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Lasting Love

Why do some loves grow and blossom as others wither and die? Love is romance. Love is commitment. Love is sharing. Love is kindness. Nourish your love over your lifetime, and your love may grow and blossom to enhance and fulfill you.

Love is romance. The Chinese have a saying that if we put a bean in a jar for every time we are physically intimate the first year, then we take a bean out of the jar every time we are physically intimate thereafter, we will have a lifetime supply! The principle is exaggerated but has truth for monkeys, rats, humans, and other mammals. Is love doomed to fade as sexual passion wanes over time? No. Not if we are more than animals. Romance is far more than sex. Romance can include an admiring smile, an adoring gaze, a gesture of deep understanding. Such romance matures when my romantic image of my lover grows into a multidimensional knowing laced with thoughtfulness and desire. Mature romance is nourished by mental monogamy.

Mental monogamy is faithfulness of the spirit as well as the body. Whenever I start to find myself aroused outside of my marriage, I practice mental monogamy by consciously directing my imagination to a time I enjoyed a great sexual union with my spouse. An enticing figure, a sensual pose, a provocative smile – all lead to visions of romantic interludes with my spouse. When my sexual drive is exclusively aligned with my emotional love for my mate, I may discover that I am naturally more sensitive, thoughtful, and romantic. Mental monogamy keeps my romantic yearnings continually growing towards my partner. Exclusive romance means love lasts.

Love is commitment. For better, for worse. Through the hard times as well as the good. Love is commitment to bring out the best in my partner when my partner is showing me the worst. We are human. We fail. We hurt. We betray our spouses' trust. Will I love and honor my mate when my mate is

least loving and honorable towards me? Such commitment, if healthy, requires knowledge. What are my partner's plans, hopes, and dreams for the future? What kind of person is my partner striving to become? What personal weaknesses are likely to interfere? What kind of marriage and family is each of us striving to create? Solid commitment involves knowing, supporting, and nurturing each other's visions for self, marriage, and family. Solid commitment is growing together to actualize our visions when confronted with both external and internal obstacles. Solid commitment is enlightened mutual devotion throughout displays of personal weaknesses. Solid commitment is bringing out the best in each other. Committed love lasts.

Love is sharing. Love is sharing my resources and myself. Love is sharing my body, my mind, my feelings, and my spirit. Love is sharing my time, my dreams, my fallacies. The unwholesome thoughts, feelings, and learned reactions from my past that are not disclosed and modified with my spouse are likely to emerge at my spouse. I share with my partner my thoughts and actions that lead me astray and how my partner may redirect me. I purge by venting and releasing with my mate my negative feelings regarding other people and events. I then replace the negative feelings with positive feelings that nurture my mind and my spirit. I let my partner help me become the person we both want me to be. We share in each other's personal, marital, and family growth. We share our love for each other. A shared love lasts.

Love is kindness. A gentle touch. A kind word. A flower. A warm hug. An appreciative glance. A passionate embrace. A pleasant surprise. A thoughtful note. A sensitive ear. An offer to help. An apology. Forgiveness. All of these nurture warm, loving feelings. When my words and deeds stem from a kind and loving heart, they are likely to reap a loving response. The longer my spouse associates me with loving interactions, the deeper and stronger the resultant love for me grows. Consistent warmth grows a stronger love.

I am not always in a warm, loving state. Sometimes I am tired and cranky. Sometimes I am physically or spiritually sore. Sometimes I am sore at my spouse! Sometimes I am deceived, hurt, neglected, or frightened by the one I

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love the most. Sometimes I feel I can't win. I cannot be consistently warm. At such times I tend to criticize, complain, or share my negative feelings at my partner. The results are often poisonous. My partner then tends to be defensive, counterattacks me, puts up emotional walls, or stays away from me. What can I do?

I cannot be consistently warm, but I can strive to be consistently warm towards my spouse. When I am cranky or sore, I can warn my spouse and temporarily keep my distance. When I am experiencing negative feelings towards my spouse, I can take a time-out: "This isn't a good time for me to talk with you. Give me twenty minutes (or whatever I think I'll need), and then I will be able to be more constructive." Once away from my spouse, I bring up and release the negative feelings in whatever way works best for me. Eventually I do run out of the negative feelings and I can again bring up the warm, loving feelings. That is the time to interact. If I want my mate to do something differently, I ask in a warm way for my mate to do something more positive for me. I refrain from complaining in a cold way about something that my mate has already done negatively that cannot be changed now. Rather than describe a negative past, I ask for help in creating a positive future. To be loved, be consistently lovable. Consistently kind love lasts.

Exclusive romance, enlightened commitment, deep personal sharing, and consistent kindness all nurture a lasting love. Let your love grow and blossom.

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This article was written by Dr. Chuck Gray, a clinical psychologist in Houston, Texas who specializes in marriage counseling and other adult relationship counseling. Chuck lives in the Houston, Texas area with his loving wife Laurie and his delightful daughters Cheryl and Valerie. The concepts for this article were derived from numerous sources, including the Mars and Venus books of Chuck's cousin, author John Gray, Ph.D. Chuck has helped thousands of Houstonians through his counseling, seminars, and workshops.

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